

SMUIN DANCING ACADEMY DANSART APARTMENTS COLONIAL MANOR

Constructed: 1913

Location: 200 North Center

Present Owners: Jerry and Judy York

One of the most popular musical groups in the early days of Lehi was the Smuin Brother's Band, formed by James and Joseph Smuin. In 1913, after more than thirty years of playing for dances far and near, Jim Smuin decided to build his own dance hall on the corner of 200 North and Center.

The grand opening of the Smuin Dancing Academy, with music provided by the seven-piece Smuin Orchestra, was held on Halloween night of 1913. The 62 x 125-foot building, designed and built by R. Monroe Wilson, was a hit from the start. With twenty-foot-high ceilings, orchestra stand on the north, twenty-five-by-sixty-two-foot gallery on the south, and two wide balconies running the length of the building, the place could and often did, entertain crowds of more than a thousand people.

All possible aspects of creature comfort were considered in the building's plans. Separate men's and women's restrooms, then a relatively unique feature, were built near the south entrance, along with a confectionery stand. Fifty windows were installed for ventilation purposes, and a large electric fan was placed on the north wall. Six large ceiling lights and banks of colored globes under the gallery and balcony, all capable of being dimmed, provided the illumination.

The most attractive feature of the hall was the forty-eight-by-ninety-two-foot spring floor, which was supported by forty-five large steel springs. Dancers recall that the floor seemed to sway with the band as though it had life in itself.

The Smuin's Orchestra was best known for its "snappy two-step" music. But through the years a host of big dance bands inspired versions of tango,

Charleston, the Black Bottom, the Big Apple, Lindsey Swing, jitterbug, and a host of novelty numbers long since forgotten by most.

Until the new Lehi High School was completed across the street in 1920, the Smuin Academy hosted all LHS ball games and dances.

Smuin introduced many innovations and gimmicks to keep the crowds coming. Waltz and fox trot contests were held. Fancy jewelry was given away and roller skating was also established. Free lessons were given by Smuin's sons.

Keith Hunter and M.R. Howard leased the Smuin dancing Academy in the fall of 1931, and changed the name to the LeVada Hall. Those difficult Depression years were hard on the dance hall business. Hunter and Howard did not renegotiate a 1932 lease. Ernest Larsen picked it up instead and offered a five dollar prize to the person submitting the best new name for the hall. The new name became "The DansArt."

During Depression years the DansArt management instituted such novelty programs as Balloon Dances, Kiss Dances, Silver Dollar Night, and Married Folks Dances. Calico Balls, where prizes were given for the "Most Becoming House Dress and Loudest Shirts," were an annual affair sponsored by the M.I.A. For a time the M.I.A. also gave regular Friday night dances under the management of Alva Wing and Ernest Larsen. Memorable bands of this era were "The Greater Melodians," "Dad Eads and Family," and "Dob Orton's Orchestra."

During World War II the DansArt went out of business. To relieve a housing crunch during the post-war years, while Geneva Steel was being built, the building was converted into twenty apartments. For many years the complex was known as the DansArt Apartments. The name was later changed to the Royal Arms Apartments, and subsequently, to the Victorian Apartments.

For years the old dance hall building slowly deteriorated. Orem residents Jerry and Judy York, recognizing the potential of the place, purchased it in 1990. Their one million dollar restoration has resulted in one of Lehi's finest historic renovations. The new name of the York's facility is the Colonial Manor Retirement Inn. It features thirty-three apartments for Senior Citizens and includes all amenities to make residential living fully independent.